

The AzMERIT Writing Task

An In-Depth Look

Introduction

This guide examines the AzMERIT Writing task. A critical component to understanding the AzMERIT Writing task is being able to understand all the elements which make up the assessment. The objective of this guide is to explain all aspects of the AzMERIT Writing assessment so all readers have a clear understanding of what the expectations are for AzMERIT.

Objectives:



Standards

How the Standards drive the AzMERIT Writing task



Reading Passages

The reading students will do on AzMERIT



Writing Guide

Help for the students on the test.



Taking the Test

What the actual AzMERIT Writing task looks like.

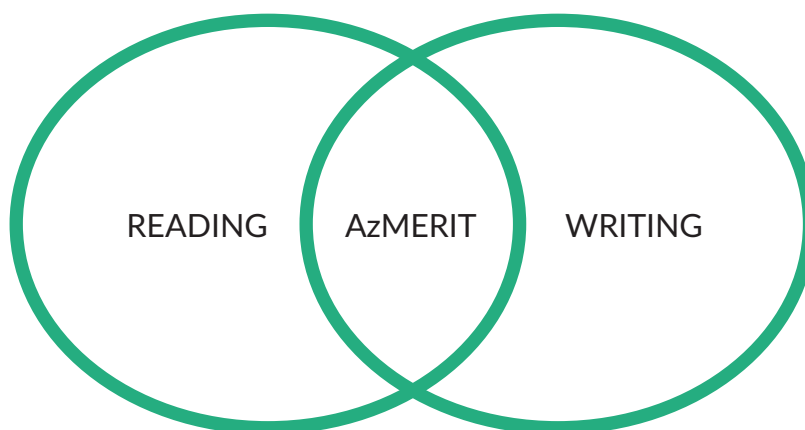
Standards

The AzMERIT Writing task reflects the changes and motivations of the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards. The standards focus on the importance of students reading complex texts and using evidence in their writing.

We tend to think of the writing standards and reading standards in isolation.

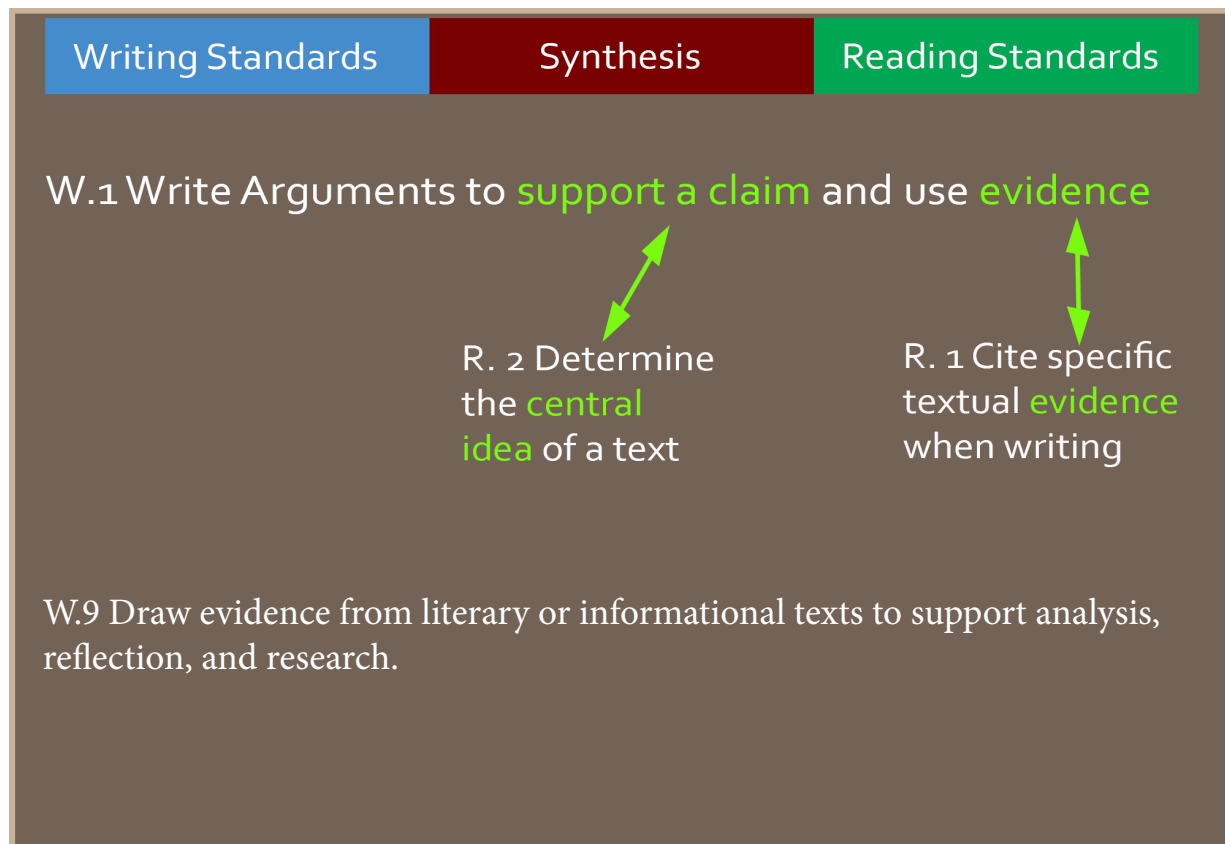


However, to meet the demands of the AzCCRS, students need to be able to use their reading and writing skills cohesively. There is a synthesis between the reading and writing standards that is reflected in the AzMERIT Writing task.



The AzMERIT Writing task requires students to blend college and career ready skills. Students are forced to think critically about a topic and use those skills to develop a response.

Here's just one quick example of how the standards support each other. You'll see that the Writing Standard, which asks students to develop a claim and use evidence, could be supported by the students ability to read and determine a central idea of the text and then use the evidence from the text to support their own claim.



The main point here is that the AzMERIT Writing Task is standards-based. The Reading and Writing Standards focus on things like: central ideas, claims, evidence, argument, information...and so on. All these parts work together to inform the AzMERIT Writing Task.

We'll be taking a much closer look at the specific standards the Writing task addresses and how those are reflected in the rubric in a later module.

Passages

Before students can write their essay for AzMERIT they have to read some passages. Read first, and then write. The passage they read will be used to form the ideas in their essay. Just as the standards call for, they are to draw evidence from the text to support their ideas. This is not a summary task. Students should synthesize the information in the passages and pull evidence to support their claims.

Here's how it works.

The passages will all revolve around a topic. For example, a passage set could be titled “Goofs and Great Inventions.”

The student will first read a passage about some guys who goofed up looking for ancient artifacts from Troy and accidentally destroyed many of them.

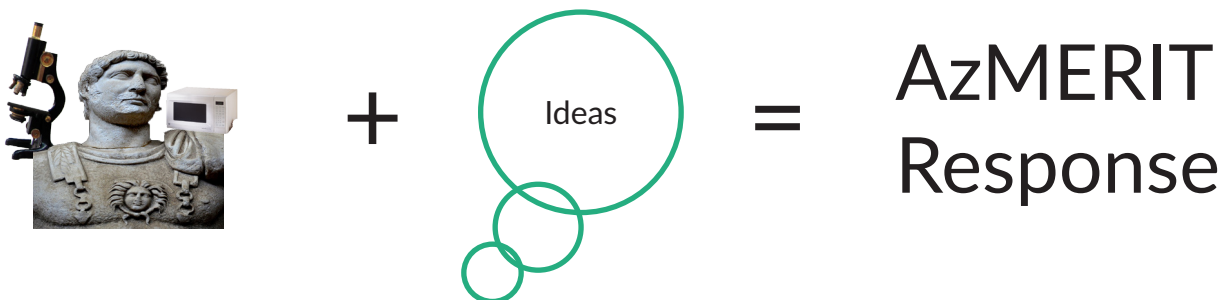
Then, they'll read a passage about how a goof up helped one scientist and led to the development of the microwave.

Finally, they'll read a passage about being “careful” in science.

The passage sets and prompts will always be set up to allow students to form their own viewpoint on the topic.



After they're done reading the passage, students will read the prompt, form their ideas, write their response. The intent is that students will use information from the passages to support their response. This focus on evidence is guided by the standards.



Writing Guide

Students are not asked to complete this task without any help. Students who are taking AzMERIT will have access to a Writing Guide.

The Writing Guide appears on the test. Students simply click a button and they can refer back to the Writing Guide for reminders about what their response should incorporate. Students who are testing on paper will have a copy of the Writing Guide in their test booklet.

The Writing Guide displays the scoring criteria from the rubric. It gives students a reminder of what they are being evaluated on. The Writing Guide is a word for word copy of the highest score point for each domain on the rubric.

The Writing Guide can be used to help prepare students for the AzMERIT. Exposing students to the Writing Guide before the assessment will allow them to get comfortable with the language on the rubric and help them to best utilize the Writing Guide when it comes test time.



Informative/Explanatory Essay Writing Guide (Grades 6–8)

| Purpose, Focus, and Organization | Evidence and Elaboration | Conventions |
|---|--|---|
| <p>The response is fully sustained and consistently focused within the purpose, audience, and task; and it has a clear controlling idea and effective organizational structure creating coherence and completeness. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strongly maintained controlling idea with little or no loosely related materialSkillful use of a variety of transitional strategies to clarify the relationships between and among ideasLogical progression of ideas from beginning to end with a satisfying introduction and conclusionAppropriate style and objective tone established and maintained | <p>The response provides thorough and convincing support, citing evidence for the controlling idea or main idea that includes the effective use of sources, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Smoothly integrated, thorough, and relevant evidence, including precise references to sourcesEffective use of a variety of elaborative techniques (including but not limited to definitions, quotations, and examples), demonstrating an understanding of the topic and textClear and effective expression of ideas, using precise languageAcademic and domain-specific vocabulary clearly appropriate for the audience and purposeVaried sentence structure, demonstrating language facility | <p>The response demonstrates an adequate command of basic conventions. The response may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Some minor errors in usage but no patterns of errorsAdequate use of punctuation, capitalization, sentence formation, and spelling |

Here is what the Writing Guide for Grade 7 looks like.



Find more resources, including the test blueprint, sample items, and a webinar of this document at www.azed.gov/assessment/azmerit

References and Citations

When referring to evidence and information from passages, students should use paraphrasing and short quotations. To credit sources, students should use informal, in-text citations (e.g., MLA author or title tags).

Taking the Test

Please visit www.azed.gov/azmerit to find the AzMERIT Sample Tests. Students taking the test have access to a number of features which will help them form their response to the prompt. Knowing and being familiar with the test layout should make students more comfortable with the task. This screenshot shows the basic layout of the AzMERIT Writing task.

Reading Passages

Writing Prompt

The screenshot displays the AzMERIT Writing task interface. On the left, under the heading "Reading Passages", is a passage titled "Goofs and Great Inventions" with the subheading "Lost Cities, Lost Treasure". The passage consists of five numbered paragraphs (1-5) describing Heinrich Schliemann's search for the lost city of Troy. On the right, under the heading "Writing Prompt", is a writing task. It includes a numbered prompt (1) asking students to write an essay arguing whether or not mistakes are a key part of discovery. Below the prompt are instructions to manage time carefully, a list of things to be sure to include (claim, counterclaims, evidence), and a note to not over-rely on one source. At the bottom of the writing prompt is a large "Response Space" for the student's answer. The interface also features a top navigation bar with buttons for Back, Next, Save, Pause, and End Test, and a right-hand toolbar with icons for Writing Guide, Dictionary, Notes, Line Reader, Zoom Out, and Zoom In.

Reading Passages

Goofs and Great Inventions

Lost Cities, Lost Treasure

1 In 1871, an adventurer named Heinrich Schliemann started digging in the ground of a Turkish city, seeking the lost land of Troy. Schliemann, a businessman and scholar, was born in Germany in 1822. As a young man he dreamed of discovering the treasures of the ancient world, and even made a plan for it when he was nine years old.

2 His youthful sense of adventure eventually brought him to California, where he made a fortune in the gold rush. With his profits, he began his second career in archaeology.

3 Archaeology was still a young science in the 1800s. In fact, it was hardly a science at all. The promise of treasure and adventure in foreign lands attracted people like Schliemann. Like a lot of treasure hunters, Schliemann was smart, curious—and hungry for gold or fame. On the other hand, he loved ancient cultures, especially Greek culture. He loved learning and traveling. By the end of his life, he spoke 13 languages, including his native German. He loved Greek history and culture so much that he and his wife Sophia named their children Agamemnon and Andromache.

4 There was another, less likeable side to Schliemann. He has been described as a trickster who didn't always tell the truth. He was known for changing or making up details in his stories of discovery. He wrote a thrilling account of his experience in the San Francisco fire of 1849—even though he was nowhere near San Francisco at the time. And as much as he loved antiquities and learning, his love of attention and money were equally strong. They may have been too strong in the end.

5 In 1868 he had been seeking the lost city of Troy for many years. He found out that a British archaeologist named Frank Calvert owned part of a site in Turkey. It was near the modern town of Canakkale. Calvert believed that ancient Troy was founded at this site. He did not have the funds to dig or discover for himself. Schliemann agreed to fund and share in the work.

Writing Prompt

1

It's no secret that sometimes great discoveries come as a result of really big mistakes. But are they always worth the problems they cause? Sometimes the mistakes lead to greatness, and sometimes they lead to disaster. Are mistakes key to making discoveries?

Write an essay for your science class web site arguing whether or not mistakes are a key part of discovery. Your essay must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the "Goofs and Great Inventions" passage set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- plan your essay;
- write your essay; and
- revise and edit your essay.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources.

Do not over rely on one source. Type your answer in the space provided.

Response Space

This document provides an in-depth look at the AzMERIT Writing task.

As a reminder, the best prep for AzMERIT is always teaching the Standards. Classroom instruction which focuses on the AzCCRS will always align with the goals of AzMERIT.

This document is the first in a series on AzMERIT Writing.

To see the other documents and other resources visit www.azed.gov/azmerit and click on “Resources for Teachers and Students”

For questions or concerns contact:
azmerit@azed.gov